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KNOX'S COLLEGE—PREPARATORY DEPARTMENT.

TORONTO, C. W., 23*d March*, 1848.

To the Members of the College Committee.

DEAR BRETHREN :

IN the prospect of a meeting of the General Committee, in the month of April, there are some matters to which I wish to call your attention. It is desirable that your minds should be directed to these prior to your meeting, in order that any measure which may be proposed, may not be absolutely new to you. Such members as may not be able to attend, will be, perhaps, so good as to communicate their sentiments to me in writing, that I may ascertain, in some degree, the mind of the Committee, before submitting any measure. Of course, any proposal that may meet your views, will still require the sanction of the Synod; but such sanction may be counted on, provided only the Committee are unanimous, or pretty generally agreed. No other motive can be supposed to influence me beyond a wish to see an Institution, on which so much depends, properly organized, and successfully conducted. I have struggled now for more than two years, in forwarding certain measures, essential, as it appears to me, to the best interests of the College; and my want of success, hitherto, has led me to make a last effort in this more formal way, that the demands of conscience and of duty may be satisfied.

I. Too great facility in the admission of students, appears to me to be an evil which ought to be strenuously guarded against. Our Institution is peculiarly a Theological Seminary. Those young men who are admitted to its benefits, enter not on a general course of study which may ultimately bear on any professional object; they are received expressly as candidates for the ministry; and the Church, in receiving them as such, throws over each the shield of her patronage and encouragement. Hence the necessity of peculiar care in this matter. Not only ought we to be satisfied with regard to moral conduct, right motive, and apparent piety; there ought to be, in addition, some good evidence of a decided change of heart in the applicant. If this is not attended to, we need not expect to realize the true object of our union as a Church in these lands, the rearing up of a spiritual ministry, with a special view to the conversion of men to God. And then in regard to mental qualification and attainments in applicants, I am clearly of opinion that greater strictness than hitherto, is absolutely necessary; and that in this matter, as in the one just referred to, unanimity in the examining Committee, ought to be held as indispensable. A mere examination before a Presbytery, does not appear to me to be sufficient. A special Committee of Synod might be named for this purpose, or a sub-committee of the College Committee, who might act under strict regulations, and with power to treat with applicants in the way of conscientious advice, rather than judicially and on probative evidence. A certain measure of previous literary attainment ought to be required in every one who is to be received into the seminary. It does not appear to me that Knox's College ought to be considered as designed to furnish merely elementary instruction in the classics; and one design of the setting up of an Academy, certainly was, to supersede this, so as to retain on behalf of the College, its peculiar character as a training Seminary for the direct work of the ministry.

II. While I hold these views advisedly, and attach great importance to them, I am nevertheless of opinion, that even the students at College, *as distinct from those of the Academy*, stand in need of much more *preparatory training* than they have been in the habit of receiving. Here I use the terms, preparatory training, not in reference to further *literary* pursuits, but rather in reference to studies *peculiarly theological*; and therefore, high as may be my hope of the indirect good to be derived from the institution of a preparatory school or Academy, I am very clearly of opinion, that an additional Professor in the department of mental training, or philosophical education, is essential to the success of our Seminary; and that under such an Institution our young men will be far more likely to realize the desired advantage in point of intellectual progress, than if mixed up with the pupils of a mere Academy, or subjected to the ordinary routine of a grammar school.

In the *first* place; the department of English literature, with a special view to the principles of composition, associated also with the rules of correct and graceful reading and elocution, ought not to be overlooked. A special exercise of this kind two or three times a week, would be highly advantageous; but to mix it up with any school-boy exercise, would defeat its end. It must be greatly mental. The young men of the College, and they only, should be its subjects; and they ought to view it as a part of philosophical training, far more closely connected than may appear at first sight with the more immediate objects of the Seminary. The disadvantages under which settlers in the provinces, in a literary view, labour, demonstrate the necessity of such exercises; while the age of the young men, and their general status, as to mental developement, place them beyond the ordinary range of scholastic forms, and render a training specially for themselves, absolutely essential.

In the *second* place: Interesting and important as may be the prelections of a professor of mental and moral philosophy, it has always appeared to me very desirable that something of a character more directly practical and elementary—I mean in a philosophical sense—should be provided for the young men. For example, (1), a plain common-sense view of the powers and capacities of the human mind, with rules for their improvement. This has little in common with the speculations of metaphysics, or the more recondite parts of intellectual philosophy; but it may be highly advantageous as a preparation for such departments of human thought. (2). An exhibition of the nature of evidence, and the laws of its regulation. This is of very great importance in all pursuits; but its importance is mightily increased, when we take into view its bearings on the evidences of natural and revealed religion. (3). The laws of reasoning or logic proper—including of course, correct, but condensed views of the methods of syllogism and induction, with analysis and synthesis, and the rules of correct *definition*. I know not a better mental exercise, than an occasional examination on the "ambiguous words," in Archbishop Whateley's Logic, or on the "definitions" in Taylor's Elements of Thought. (4). The nature and sources of prejudice; the causes of error; the Idols of Bacon, and the large tribe of *fallacies* in argument, present a wide, but most inviting field for young enquirers; and here the dangerous errors afloat among philosophers, as to the nature of *causation*, demand careful searching. Some of the most plausible and pernicious forms of modern scepticism may be traced to these errors. (5). The *ideal theory* ought to be explained to our students, not only in its older forms, as held by the ancients, and by such earlier moderns as Des Cartes, Malebranche, and Locke, but as recently revived by Dr. Thomas Brown and his admirers. The theory is, that the mind sees only images of its own creation or the representations of things without it, and not things themselves. This is the famous hypothesis out of which Bishop Berkeley formed his theory of the non-existence of a material world; and following out whose principles, Hume succeeded in satisfying himself that neither mind nor matter had any existence. The world is under infinite obligations to such men as Reid, Stewart, Campbell, Beattie, and others, who exposed the baselessness of the theory, and appealed successfully to primary principles of human belief, as ultimate facts in the arrangements of God. I tremble when I think of the readiness with which the exploded theory has been received; because I look upon it as not only destructive of all the evidence from final causes, in proof of the existence of God, but as directly subversive of all belief in the

existence of any beings in the universe except ourselves. (6). Modern discoveries and speculations in Geology, render it essential that our young men should be informed on such subjects, so as to detect and expose the fallacies of such writers as the authors of the "Constitution of Man," and "the Vestiges of creation," and such information may be easily communicated irrespective altogether of any peculiar fondness for the exact sciences. The theory of "world building," as well as the theory of "ideas," will soon fall before the lessons and the inductive processes of an exact logic.

I wish it to be distinctly understood, that according to my conceptions of preparatory training, Knox's College is, in regard to the above matters, essentially defective; and my complaints on this account, for two years past, I do not feel ashamed to acknowledge. My brethren may deem them groundless, but all I ask is enquiry, and a fair tribunal for final judgment.

III. The remarks hitherto made, respect the Institution in its primary bearings only, but I attach to them great importance in any circumstances, and more especially in the present position of our young country, as contrasted with the advancing intellect of the age. It must not, however, be inferred, that my objections are limited to the elementary or preliminary departments of study. In the higher walks of metaphysical and morel science, I would desiderate for our students a pretty full view of the leading questions in morals, and the various *theories* of morals which have been put forth with such philosophical parade, by ingenious men. An acquaintance with these is necessary, together with a knowledge of their comparative merits, and above all, an exposure of their errors, when tried by the test of revelation. Along with this, I would recommend a concise system of Christian ethics.

When in October, 1844, I received the appointment from the Synod, "to be the Professor of Theology, and to have the charge of training the young men for the holy ministry," I undertook the office under an impression that it comprehended the right and the obligation to see that the preliminary training, as distinct from what is properly theological, was adapted to the end in view. The young men I was led to consider as *all students in theology*, that is, "under training for the holy ministry;" and this is the plain explanation of the fact, that so soon as I saw, or thought I saw, a deficiency in the "training" department—a deficiency which neither the learning nor the assiduity of the professor of "science and literature" appeared to me likely to supply—I set myself in some temporary way, to make up the deficiency. With this view, besides personal examinations, I prepared and delivered to the students, in November and December 1845, about twenty lectures on the philosophy of mind, and the nature of mental discipline; the Baconian method of induction, with its relations to theological study; the theories of morals; and the errors of Brown's moral system, in reference to the scripture doctrine of rewards. I also sought to obtain the assistance of several intelligent ministers of our own body, who might devote a month or two to such studies for the benefit of the young men, the church supplying their pulpits in the mean time. Although disappointed in this expectation, I still resolved to make another attempt, and in September, 1846, I applied for the second time, personally to Mr. Baine of Galt, to undertake the department of Logic, with a special reference to the *philosophy of evidence*. He entertained the proposal favourably, and took with him a copy of "Hedge's Elements of Logic," for examination as to its fitness to be used as a text book. Circumstances prevented this plan from being realized; and at the commencement of the Session of 1846-7, I found for the first time that I had been labouring under a misapprehension as to the extent of the powers entrusted to me, and that in reality, the preliminary department of study, was wholly independent of that allotted to theology, and that *with this last* only had I to do.

On the arrival of Mr. McCorkle, however, in November 1846, I made known to him my difficulties in regard to the preparatory classes; and on finding that he had been engaged for several years in giving lessons to young men at Glasgow College, in Logic and Rhetoric, (prior to their entrance on the more direct departments of philosophy), I drew up and read to the College Committee, a scheme for the winter studies, which would have put under that gentleman all the students who had not been instructed in these branches. I succeeded so far as to obtain the consent of the College Committee to his undertaking a class for *Rhetoric;* but Logic was not included, and even the time allotted for the other, only *two hours in the week*, was far too short. Still, good was done by this arrangement; and looking back upon it as an experiment on a small scale, it seems to me to have been a successful one, and amply to bear out my suggestions and views in the matter.

From all that I can hear, it does not seem to me that the deficiency has been at all supplied during the winter session now drawing to its close. Of course, the proceedings of the Synod at Kingston in June last, precluded me from taking any part in College arrangements; but I still entertained the hope, that some proposal would have been made to me, to supplement a defect whose existence had not been questioned. When this was not done, I made offer privately to the students, that if any number, not fewer than six, wished an hour a day for logic and practical dialectics, my time and my labour were at their command. The time of the young men, however, was so fully taken up by other pursuits, that this number could not be obtained, and nothing was done till about a month ago, when my much esteemed friend, Dr. Willis, resolved to devote two hours weekly to the work. His class for Logic, however, embraced *none of the junior students;* and its application to the *senior* classes rather confirmed than disproved the soundness of my impressions.

It is needless to conceal the fact, that the real difficulty in occupying the long neglected field, has arisen from a feeling of delicacy towards the learned and accomplished gentleman who holds the chair of "science and literature," or "mental and moral philosophy," and on whose domain it is supposed that the Professorship of Logic would seriously trench. My reply to this has always been, that the field is already too large for any one man—that the number of students is yearly increasing—and that in point of fact, the field remains virtually not taken up at all. Am I asking too much for our rising institution, when I plead for a second Professor in the preparatory department? Or am I in error when I say, that beyond all question, the mental discipline with which I think the students ought to be privileged, so far from proving injurious, would rather pave the way for a more just appreciation of the prelections both of Professor Esson and of Dr. Willis?

In point of fact the Synod did, in June last, express an approval of the suggestion in the College Report, as to the necessity of an "additional Professor," (Record, p. 293), while they left it to the College Committee to fix "the *precise place* which he should occupy." Mr. Bayne was, moreover, empowered to obtain if possible, such a professor from Scotland, but it appears that his instructions were not sufficiently specific to guide the Colonial Committee in the selection of such a person as might be qualified to fill the situation in view. One object of my statement will be gained if it succeeds in impressing on the College Committee, the sense of a glaring existing defect, and the necessity of obtaining the services of a *second* Professor in the preparatory department, under the designation perhaps, of the "Professor of Logic, Rhetoric, and Mental discipline."

I am aware of the objection on the ground of expense; but I am not inclined to infer from this that no effort should be made to supplement an existing defect by the means which are in our power. There are members of Synod, who, if asked, would cheerfully give their services gratuitously, for periods more or less extensive. Dr. Willis also, might with ease, appropriate one hour daily to this department; taking in connection with it, perhaps, the evidences of Christianity, as affording the very best specimens of the application of that part of Logic which has to do with the rules of evidence. With regard to myself, it would give me great pleasure to assist the young men in any way that may be thought best, to the extent of an hour a day. During the absence of Dr. Willis this summer, nothing would to me be more pleasant than to make myself in any measure useful in the department of mental training to the students who may remain in the city or near it.

I need scarcely say, that from what I have learned of the feelings of the Free Church of Scotland towards us, in the very department to which this letter refers, I am very sure that they will most readily assist us, by the mission of a Deputy, in the end of autumn, who might be qualified and inclined to give help in the preparatory studies of the young men, during part, at least, of the winter season, or until a permanent arrangement can be made.

Although the present communication has respect mainly to the preparatory department of the College, I may be permitted to notice, in regard to all the students of the seminary, that one lecture a week, on pastoral duty, with devotional and catechistical exercises in addition, and visits to the sick, the afflicted, and the dying, would form a valuable addition to the existing arrangements, under the distinct title of pastoral theology. That this office might be conjoined with the office of the ministry in the city, without the charge of a plurality of offices, appeared to me very clear; and had the Synod seen meet to confide to me the charge of this department, I do not think that the people of Knox's church would have uttered the slightest complaint on account of my acceptance of it.

If I find that even *one* member of Committee shall coincide with me, in my views as thus developed, I shall not fail to bring the matter before the Committee and the Synod.

May the Great Head of the Church direct all your proceedings in wisdom, and overrule them all to his glory!

Dear Brethren, I am, very respectfully, Yours,

ROBERT BURNS.

The following letter, which was printed in the "Banner" of February, 1845, may be referred to in proof that I never contemplated the permanent union of the pastoral office with the professorship of theology. It was addressed to the students at large, however, and without any distinction of the preparatory class from that of theology:—

Paisley, December 28th, 1844.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS:

The Synod of your Church has called me to take the inspection of your studies. The divine Head of the Church, will, we trust, speedily raise up some one, who, to the full vigour of mental power, adds that, for the want of which, neither talent, nor learning, nor eloquence can atone,—the living energy of a spirit quickened from on high; the holy activity of the men of other times, who counted not their lives dear to them, provided only they could spend and be spent in the service of Him whom they loved. I feel my utter incompetence to take the charge of those on whom shall be devolved the mighty responsibility of conveying the message of Heaven to degraded and ruined man; and I feel it the more, inasmuch as it has all along been my clear conviction, that the pastoral office is of itself quite sufficient, and more than sufficient, to engage all the time and all the energies of one man. In accepting this charge, therefore, I feel as if guilty of a glaring inconsistency; and such an impression cannot but add indefinitely, to the weight and responsibility of the charge. In the infancy of the church, such an union of offices is tolerated, because it is unavoidable. The Fathers of the Reformed Churches of Europe found it necessary to act on the same principle; and the men who have been instrumental in promoting the religious improvement of the American settlements, in former and in later times, have done the same. Such considerations, however, do not diminish, but enhance the responsibility incurred, while they demonstrate the duty of every church, in seeking to embark the services of ministers untrammeled, in the more laborious departments.

If I have had the temerity of closing with a proposal, from which my sense of inability would have led me to shrink, it was not till after all my efforts to obtain the services of one or more of the ablest men in the Church at home, had ended in painful disappointment. I rejoice that my esteemed friend and brother, the Rev. Andrew King, of Glasgow, has engaged for a season, to superintend your studies. The thought has more than once struck me, that possibly this excellent servant of Christ may, in the holy providence of Almighty God, have been sent to Canada, that he may remain with you, and the Churches there, for their and your furtherance and joy of faith. If it is permitted to me again to cross the great ocean, and to settle in the west, I shall rejoice not a little in finding such a fellow-labourer in the field, and that field we know, is sufficiently wide. In the mean time the labours of Mr. King among you, will be by you duly appreciated, and when the season of his charge of you shall terminate, the pious Ministers of the Districts to which you may remove, will, I doubt not, exercise over you, a kind and edifying superintendence. My earnest prayer for you from day to day shall be, that your studies may all be conducted in the spirit of humble diligence, and entire dependence on God; and that each and all of you may ever be constrained by the love of Christ, as your animating principle; and that the commanding view you shall take of the Christian Ministry, may be that of a divinely appointed means of converting men to God, and saving souls from death. Oh! how miserably low and degraded are those views of the Christian Ministry which elevate it no higher than a species of moral police; a kind of decent instrumentality for keeping the people in order, and smoothing the rugged surface of society! Let *your* views rise far above this drivelling level; for let me assure you, that just in proportion to the magnitude of your aims, will be the measure of your spiritual activity in the prosecution of your studies. An activity which is merely secular, I would not desiderate in candidates for the sacred office; but a vitality that is spiritual, and an activity that is heaven-directed, God the Spirit will assuredly bless.

In common with your able preceptor, you must at present feel the great want of properly selected books in theology, for reference and perusal. Whether I may ever be permitted to see you in the flesh or not, one thing I pledge myself to do for you, and that is, to endeavour to collect for your use, a Library of Literature and Theology; and the Church at home will, unquestionably, help me in this. They have already promised to do so; and private friends in the mother country, and perhaps on the continent of Europe, may make presents to you of suitable publications. But I am strongly inclined to give thanks that you are at present almost entirely shut up to the Bible! The divine author of that Holy Book, is taking each of you by the hand, and is leading you directly to the fountain that is pure, and healthful, and life-giving. And do you think the blessing will be withheld if you are found day after day drinking at the sacred springs which are exclusively his own? "Bonus textuarius est bonus Theologus," said Martin Luther; and if the historian of that remarkable man, and of his times, has succeeded in throwing one charm around his work, more pleasing, more fascinating than another, it is that derived from the scriptural allusions with which it abounds, and the Biblical "Theopneustic" spirit which it breathes. Merle D'Aubigne is not only a learned man, whose researches into the archives of other times have been profound, but above all other things, he is mighty in the Scriptures, and he has drank deep of the river that makes glad the city of our God. I might say the same of *our* great Historian, Dr. McCrie; for every one who has read his sermons and lectures, must have been struck with the extent and accuracy of his scriptural attainments, as well as with the vigour and independence of mind, which his profound and hallowed study of the oracles of God, has imparted to all his writings.

Dear young friends let me give you an advice. If your adoption of theology as a study, is merely professional,—if you have no reason to think that you have been renewed in the spirit of your minds,—if faith in Christ, the gracious Redeemer, does not occupy the place of a commanding principle within you,—if, in a word, you are not really "living members of Christ," and partakers of that faith which unites to the Saviour,—and is the animating principle of all obedience; pause before you go one step farther. It is not *Licentiates* that Canada needs. It is not in the want of a professional Christianity, that your country withers and is blasted. She needs a larger supply of men of power—men of unction—men of spiritual life and holy energy. My prayer is, that such may be raised up from among *you*, and that the "Free" Presbyterian Church of Canada, may prove an instrument of mighty efficacy for advancing the interests of Evangelical truth. With my best wishes and earnest prayers for your progress and success in all your studies,

I remain, affectionately, and sincerely, Yours,

(Signed) ROBERT BURNS.